

THE ARAB AT HOME

593 a family to each other, the way that old and feeble mem-
bers of a previous generation are cared for without ques-
tion or complaint, the unquenchable cheerfulness that no
misfortune or discomfort can dampen, are a pleasure to
recall. The same poverty that makes polygamy impos-
562 sible forces the women to be partners in all the activities
of the household. There are no secluded women in this
community, and the result is a comradeship and mutual
helpfulness and unashamed love between a man and his
wife that are beautiful to see. They share the same pov-
erty and the same hardships. Together they watch prob-
ably two-thirds of the children that come into the home
sicken and die. Bedouin families are not large, but that
is not because the number of children born is small.
Bedouin women also follow their husbands in war and
manage the commissary department. In times of neces-
sity they take up weapons themselves and fight.

- 534 As might be expected, the standards of morals are far
higher than in other parts of Arabia. An unaccompanied
girl caring for her sheep out in the desert is safe in that
country of poverty and equality, of freedom and sim-
plicity. We came from Abu Jifan once, a whole caravan
of us, to Hasa, a distance of three days' journey, and
from among the Bedouins that were congregated in the
neighborhood of the wells of Abu Jifan a girl came
along to Hasa for treatment. She rode at a distance of
half a mile from our caravan all the distance to Hasa and
encamped by herself each of the three nights that we were
out. Not all of the men of our caravan were Bedouins.
Some were townsmen, and camel-men at that, with talk
as foul as might be expected from birds of passage of
that variety. The first night there was some remark
about the girl off there by herself, the exact import of

THE BEDOUIN OF THE DESERT 35

which I was glad not to understand, but one of the ⁶³⁴ Bedouin youngsters who were with us flared back at the townsman with remarks that reduced him immediately to unconditional surrender. Every noon and every night the boy took her some of our rice and bread, and she accompanied this men's caravan, entirely alone, till we arrived in the city. I remember that same boy's earnest and simple cordiality as he congratulated one of his warm friends on her recent marriage. "May God increase your prosperity, your camels and your children."

It is interesting to observe the fundamental economic ⁵⁷⁷ conceptions in a community as primitive as that of the ⁶⁷⁵ desert. Contracts are sacred in Arabia, as in the West. The guest and his host are bound by a contract the terms of which are perfectly understood by both parties and are practically never violated. Many of these Bedouins enter into contracts to dive at the opening of the diving season in Bahrein, and one never hears of such a contract being broken. There is little occasion for the making of contracts in the desert, but even at the price of personal loss, a contract entered into in good faith must be carried out.

The Bedouin's conception of property, however, differs ⁴²¹ from ours considerably. To say that it is communistic is to exaggerate, but there is certainly a strong tinge of communism about it. Property, that is to say what the ⁵⁵⁶ earth affords in the way of food, shelter and clothes, is of value because it sustains human life. The food, the clothes and the houses that the Bedouin's world can produce, are never enough to go around. He considers them valuable simply as they minister to human need. In the West property comes to be regarded as sacred, much as it is in the West. Beautiful houses are admired and

The Welcome

Chap. II

in front of my tent, everything is ready to give me welcome. Salim⁰⁰⁰
stands alone in front of the tent, and answers my *saldm 'alaikum*,⁸³⁴
for it would not do for his womenfolk to appear in the presence of
my hired driver and the shaikh's *fiddwi*, Sa'ud. They can, however,
be seen discreetly peeping from their tent. 576

My goods and chattels are next unpacked, and I proceed to get⁰⁰⁰
things shipshape. Whilst Jawad is putting together my camp bed, and
opening up my bedding, coffee is brought and served.

As soon as the coast is clear, and the menfolk are safely ensconced⁵⁷⁶
in their tent, in creeps the gentle-eyed and sweet-voiced Amsha to⁵²¹
bid me welcome in the reception portion of my black goat-hair tent.
She walks in gracefully, and in her low contralto voice bids me, "Al
guwa ya Abu Sa'ud" (Strength to you, O father of Sa'ud), the usual
salutation among the womenfolk. "Allah i gauichi ya Um Hussa"
(God give you strength, O mother of Hussa) I reply, and then follows
a host of welcoming sentences, such as, "How are you? How is Um
Sa'ud? What news of the Khatuna (the wife)? and Sa'ud and Zahra
(my children) how are they? Well, well, I hope. What is doing
in Kuwait, and what news of rain?" etc. Amsha is followed by
Maneira, the Mutairiyah, helper in the house, and Hussa, Amsha's
daughter of fifteen (recently veiled to show she is now a woman and
of marriageable age). Then the daughters of Dhurwaihi the herdsman,
and of Maziad, the Dhafiri, and last of all comes coal-black little
Mubarak, the negro slave's little boy—Barruk they call him in terms
of endearment. The other little curly-headed boy, Marzuk or Mzairik,
his brother, is still with the lambs a quarter of a mile away, and so is
Hamud, Maneira's small son. [582]

The women, led by Amsha, sit round me in a circle, all asking
after me and all wanting to know something. Little Hussa, whom
I have known since she was seven years old, encouraged by her
mother, comes and sits by my side after holding up her *burga* a
moment for me to kiss her dimpled mouth. She has mother's per-
mission to do this, even though she is now fifteen and a grown
woman, for have I not known her since she was a little child? After
this preliminary, she retires again and sits by her mother's side,
keeping that silence which all well-behaved Badawin children main-
tain when their elders are present. Only shy little Barruk comes up⁰⁰⁰

The Badawin's Code

Chap. III

577

A man's first duty is towards God.

His second, the protection of his tent neighbour (*qasir*).

His third, attention to the laws of Hospitality (*dhidfa*).

His fourth, his duty towards a traveller under his conduct (*rafq*).

His fifth, attention to the laws of Personal Protection and Sanctuary (*wejh* and *dakhla*).

His sixth and last is to himself: to raid when he can and keep what he has captured (*chassib*).

It is noteworthy that in fulfilling this last duty he thinks of it as a sort of reward for what has gone before. Raiding is no sin, but a virtue, and to kill your enemy a still greater virtue. Therefore, to steal your enemy's cattle is not robbery but an exploit to be proud of. Your enemy will do the same to you to-morrow if he gets the chance. (See Chapter VII.) [721]

THE BADAWIN WOMAN (*Badawiyah*)

Taking the good with the bad, the Badawin woman is nearly all charm, the natural charm of an unspoiled daughter of Eve, who knows nothing of the world, and little of town life except from hearsay. 157

She has very much of the child about her; all the delightfulness and all the unreasonableness of a child.

She is prone to sudden storms of rage, and will sulk without apparent reason. She is full of jealousy, and will love and hate with passion and ferocity, yet she can be the gentlest of beings and is capable of great sacrifice. She adores her children, though she has no idea of teaching them discipline or self-control; she will fly at her husband, if he attempts to punish their child, and will go off the deep end if her husband does not sleep close by her side (*ma yargud wiha*) every night. [555]

Badawin unmarried girls are, of course, deborred from any male society or male friendships outside the circle of their own immediate families, but married women have far more freedom than their town sisters, and can be on delightfully friendly terms with males of their own *saifa* or *hamala*. They have strong ideas of propriety, and are sensitive to a degree about their reputation. The most dreadful thing in the world that can happen to them is to be talked 62 724 521 558

Sex Indulgence

Chap. IX

- 834 removes the *burqa* or mask from his bride's face on the first night.
291 She invariably tries to keep it on for about ten days or so out of modesty. His Majesty Bin Sa'ud, however, told the writer that he had had, he supposed, some four hundred wives during his life, but had never seen the face of any one of them. He presumably referred to his many Badawin brides, whom he married usually for a night or two, and then divorced them. This is a custom common among important shaikhs, and involves no disgrace at all to the girl or to the man. Should a child result from these one-or-two-night marriages, the 586 shaikh or big man gives the mother a salary till the child is four or five years old, and then the child is taken away from the mother and placed in the father's house. During this nursing period the mother must not marry. If she does, the child is at once taken away and given to a wet nurse. The Al Sa'ud, Al Subah, Al Khalifah princes regularly go in for such alliances among their Badawin subjects, but usually take away at an early age any children that may be born.
- 515 Both man and woman must have a complete bath after sexual 833 intercourse. This is a precept of religion, and the wildest Badawin must conform to this rule. Even though only a small bowl of water may be available, the whole body must be washed all over.*
- 844 During her monthly periods a woman is forbidden to have inter- 515 course with her husband for full seven days. When the menstrual period is over, a woman is unclean until she washes all over; this is called "washing her hair" (*ghussal al ras*).†
- 293 During Ramadhan (the annual thirty-day fast) sexual intercourse is forbidden by day, but not by night.

It is no exaggeration to say that sexual intercourse is loved by the ordinary Arab above all pleasures in the world. It is the one great pleasure common to rich and poor alike, and the one moment of forgetfulness in his daily round of troubles and hardships that Badawin or townsman can enjoy. Men and women equally love the act, which is said to keep man young, "just like riding a mare".

The Arab seems to possess strength above the average for sexual

* Prayer of a woman after sexual intercourse when performing ablutions: *A'ali ala Muhammad wa ali Muhammad nawa'id aghail an il janabi fi hadha al ma al juri karim 'Ilah in'ali.*

† When a girl reaches womanhood, she is said to be "Now washing her head".

Exclamations

Chap. IX

PRETTY CUSTOMS AND EXPRESSIONS AMONG WOMEN

(a) *Expressions of astonishment* (at seeing or hearing something startling).

Ya kabdi kabda—Oh! my liver. (Especially 'Ajman women.)

Ya galbi galba—My heart of hearts. ('Ajman women.)

Yumma!—Oh Mother!

Ybba!—Oh Father!

Men have one very common expression, "Alláh" pronounced with a long drawl on the final "a". This when they have seen or heard something really surprising or wonderful.

(b) *Expressions of affection.*

Ba'ad aini aini—Oh my eyes, my eyes.

Ba'ad galbi galbi—My heart, my heart.

Ba'ad ruhi ruhi—My soul, my soul.

(c) *Woman's expression of impatience.*

Ya waili waili—E.g. "Come here Nura, the English lady wants to speak to you, why don't you hurry you foolish one, *ya waili waila*, what is the matter with you!"

(d) When the head of the house, or a son, returns from a long journey or from the pearl-banks, the woman of the house hangs up on a pole, with a cross-piece to it, one of her best and most brilliantly coloured *thabbs*. Among townswomen, this is hung up on the roof of the house, for the world to see. In the case of Badawin women in the desert the pole is placed in front of the tent. This custom is almost similar to that observed when an important shaikh or personage is expected to arrive at or pass a camp, and the Badawin ladies desire to show him welcome.

The custom is known as *raiyat*.

(e) Another pretty custom is to show to a guest at a tent, or big man passing by and staying for coffee, a baby that is just born, when for luck he gives into its little hand a rupee or riyal.

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

The statement often made that a bride never shows her face to her Arab husband is not exactly correct. As often as not the husband forcibly

Virile Greybeards

Chap. IX

purposes, as can be seen from the large number of men of eighty years ⁸³³ and over who still continue to marry and produce children. Haji Hillal bin Faja'an al Mutairi, the famous Kuwait pearl merchant, married the last of his thirty-two wives at eighty-five, and got two boys and three girls by her. His Majesty King 'Abdul 'Aziz al Sa'ud told Shaikh 'Abdullah al Salim al Subah (according to the latter's statement to me), that the most wonderful experience of his life and that above all things worth living for had always been "To put his lips to the woman's lips, his body on her body and his feet on her feet".

A Badawin bride will show great modesty on "the first night", ⁸³⁴ and will make no effort to uncover her face, head or body. The husband must not ask her to do this, for such an act would be most immodest, and might lay her open to the suspicion in her husband's eyes of previous immoral leanings.

The man's role is to plead with her first, and when she refuses, gives a negative shake of her head, or hangs her head in silence, he is entitled to use force, and himself to remove her *burqa* and various parts of her clothes. She does not resent her husband's doing this but she must show proper modesty by pretending to resist with all her might.

A woman who suckles ~~one~~ children of opposite sexes, one her ⁶⁰⁸ own and the other the ⁸⁵³ ~~other~~, makes those children blood brother and sister. They can never marry each other, and the boy throughout his life ~~she~~ took upon the face of the girl so nursed with him. They have become foster brother and sister. For example, 'Abdullah al Mubarak al Subah is foster brother of the daughter of a Rashaida woman, the wife of one of the shaikh's *fidwas*, by name Abu Hadida. I know both personally, and though 'Abdullah is the son of the late Ruler of Kuwait, he treats the Rashaida girl in true foster-brother fashion, quite charming to see, and often goes in spring to camp with her father and mother, and is on the friendliest of terms with his foster sister.

A woman's breast is known as *daid* (plu. *daid*, dual *daidain*).

A maiden's breast is *sakaid* (two breasts are *sakaidain*).